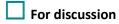


Participation of Children Looked After and Care Leavers into Education, Employment and Training (EET)

August 2021

For decision





SUMMARY

This report provides information to ACE Committee about the current picture of Children Looked After and Care Leavers in education, employment and training (EET) and evidences the support available to those who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) or at risk of NEET.

OWNER

Leaving Care Team Virtual School Elevate Service

VERSION

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Contents

1.	Introduction and Context3
2	Current EET and NEET Cohort4
3.	Leaving Care Team Service Support5
4.	Elevate Team Service Support5-8
5.	Virtual School Service Support
4.	Conclusion and Recommendations



1.0 Introduction and Context

- 1.1 The responsibility for children and young people's education and training within BFfC primarily lies with; Children's Social Care, the Virtual School and the Elevate team. These services work collaboratively with children looked after and leaving care in settings such as schools, further education (FE) colleges, universities and other training providers. Elevate has a statutory responsibility for tracking, supporting and reporting all the NEET and EET children who are looked after, aged 16-18 within the Reading postcode area.
- 1.2 The report will focus on services being provided by Leaving Care, Virtual School and the Elevate team to children looked after (CLA) and care leavers (CL). The report will provide an education, employment or training overview of the current picture of children looked after and care leavers aged 16-25 years, who have engaged in positive outcomes such as education, employment and training.
- 1.3 Brighter Futures for Children has responsibility to complete key statutory duties around young people's participation and engagement in education, employment or training. The DfE have provided local authorities statutory guidance and a framework *Participation of young people in education, employment and training* to support us in increasing EET participation and reducing the NEET numbers. This guidance is issued under sections 18 and 68(4) of the Education and Skills Act 2008 (ESA 2008) in relation to sections 10, 12 and 68 of that Act.
- 1.4 In 2019 a NEET Strategy was developed in response to BFfC and Reading Borough Council receiving Ministerial Letters regarding the concerning high NEET and Not Known numbers of young people in Reading, the NEET action plan focussed on 3 key themes:
- Reduce the high numbers of vulnerable young people's non-participation in education, employment and training (NEET)
- Develop a robust tracking process that will reduce the Not Knowns and increase and encourage NEET young people to reengage;
- Develop a high-quality support service that young people can readily access that will encourage positive participation into good quality education, employment and training outcomes.
- 1.5 This report will update the progress on these three themes, and what the education, employment or training opportunities that the Post 16 children looked after and care leavers are currently accessing.

2.0 Current EET and NEET Cohort

2.1 The current cohort consists of young people who are age between 16- 25. This includes all of Reading's children looked after and care leavers who are resident both in and outside of the borough. The total number of care leavers in August 2021 was 217, which is based on the 5003 Mosaic Report which provides performance summary data. From this data the NEET percentages for the last 3 years, has been on a positive decline, there has been an overall 13% decrease in the NEET numbers since August 2019.

Table 1 Overall NEET figure (Based on CSC Monthly Performance Data)					
Aug 2019 August 2020 August 2021					
44%	40%	31%			

2.2 The Department of Education EET and NEET data, also reflects the local picture, showing that BFfC statutory duty for (16-17-year-olds) children looked after, and care leavers.

Table 2 16 and 17-Year olds Care Leavers EET in Reading.

	Care Leav	ers	June 2021				
	CL EET		EET% Not NEET		NEET & NEET & No		
				Known		Not Known	Known %
England	4178	3085	74.6%	126	3.0%	1053	25.4%
South East	497	356	72.2%	21	4.3%	137	27.8%
Reading	5	5	100%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

Published DFE Data - 30 June 2021 Performance Statutory Data

Table 3 16 and 17-Year olds Children Looked After EET in Reading.

	Children I	ooked Afte	er	June 20	21		
	CLA EET EET		EET%			NEET & NEET & Not	
				Known		Not Known	Known %
England	8490	6781	80.1%	227	2.7%	1453	17.2%
South East	1403	1093	78.0%	33	2.4%	275	19.6%
Reading	35	29	82.9%	0	6	0	17.1%

Published DFE Data - 30 June 2021 Performance Statutory Data

2.3 The above table 2 and 3 shows a breakdown of those young people recorded as a care leaver and looked after young person, as reported by the DfE. Our care leaver data shows that as of 30 June 2021 we had 100% engaged in Education, Employment and Training. With 0% NEET or Not Known. Our Looked After data shows that as of 30 June 2021 we had 82.9% engaged in EET, 0% Not Knowns and 17.1% (6 Young People) registered as NEET.

3.0 Leaving Care Team Service Support

- 3.1 The Leaving Care Team have established good practice examples of collaborative working arrangements between the Elevate Team, Virtual School and other providers to promote available EET opportunities. Also support with matching children looked after and care leavers who are NEET with these and removing barriers for young people to access opportunities and sustain EET. The Leaving Care Team Manager attends monthly NEET/EET tracking meeting alongside the Virtual School and Elevate team. We discuss every NEET young person and those at risk of becoming NEET. Solutions are identified to resolve the barriers and agree on realistic steps towards re-engagement into EET.
- 3.2 The Leaving Care Team Elevate and Virtual School are working collaboratively to identify suitable applicants for referrals to training courses or additional support from mentoring or other charities such as: Starting Point, New Meaning, Adviza's Employability programme with Thames Water, Buttle UK, Barnardo's, paid traineeships and internship programmes.
- 3.3 As a result of close collaborative working with the Elevate Team and Virtual School, has allowed the Leaving Care Team to increased number of referrals by social workers and leaving care advisers to promote EET opportunities to young people.
- 3.4 The Leaving Care Team have continued to attend and support Post 16 Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings, this is in conjunction with the Virtual School. These have been attended by the young person, further education colleges, training providers, social workers and carers. All have been working to support the wider education and learning needs, developing the potential of young people to successfully remain in education, employment or training settings.
- 3.5 Work with the BFfC Participation officer to offer a 6 weeks Skills of Life programme to care leavers age 16 to 24, covering areas such as healthy living, managing a tenancy, managing money, healthy relationships and educational and training opportunities. This programme is offered 3 times per year, however restricted by covid 19 in the past year. The programme is well attended by young people and they receive valid accreditation after each of the 6 modules.

4.0 Elevate Team Service Support

- 4.1 The Elevate Team has dedicated resources allocated to YOS, Post 16 SEND and Reading College to support young people with SEND who are NEET and to those who may be at risk of dropping out from post 16 learning to NEET. Children looked after and care leavers are supported into EET by careers coaches at YOS or Reading College.
- 4.2 The Elevate Team operate a face-to-face and virtual appointment duty system, which is there to support children and young people with career and employment information, advice and guidance through various communication channels: face-to-face, telephone, live chat, emails and through attendance at PEP reviews or meetings as and when required. Elevate also operate virtual appointments system to young people who live out of the Reading area.

- 4.3 In January 2021 Elevate went into a partnership with the West Berkshire DWP to deliver the Youth Offer in Reading, resulting in us setting up Youth Skills and Employment Hub in the town centre, a 12-month contract to provide holistic support to vulnerable young people 16-24 who are NEET or at risk of NEET. The hub is being delivered from the Curious Lounge a new CIC company, offering a safe, relaxed modern space allowing us to deliver a 'one-stop' careers and employment hub for young people, with also the opportunity to increase our engagement with local employers, businesses, building stronger networks with local partners, providers and support services for the benefit of young people.
- 4.4 Strong partnership with the DWP has expanded partnership networks further and increased local Post 18 opportunities, for example receiving information first-hand on local Kickstart schemes and opportunities, are able to access sector-based academies, mentoring circles or other DWP supported programmes. Elevate and DWP job coaches work collaboratively to support care leavers in receipt of universal credit directly into training programmes and employment.

Case Study

K, 20 years old, care leaver, lives in Reading, NEET

K's leaving care adviser arranged a face-to-face meeting for K with Elevate Careers at the Curious Lounge. K was accompanied to the first meeting by her leaving care adviser as she was very anxious. K is a vulnerable young person; her self-esteem has deteriorated since she lost her job in March 2020. She is a bright and polite young person who enjoyed school. She achieved three GCSEs at grade 3. She doesn't have own her place to live and relies on relatives who provide accommodation for her. Her leaving care adviser is supporting her with her application to get housing. She relies on universal credit to buy food and other essentials.

Elevate careers coach met with K a few times getting to know K, encouraging K to express her thoughts and wishes about the future. K was encouraged to explore the opportunities available to her to get further qualifications and work experience to return to work. K was not ready for work due to low confidence and lack of previous work experience. She wanted to focus on developing her confidence, self-esteem and improve her health in general.

Careers adviser explored a number of options with K- she decided that she wanted to do Prince's Trust Team programme. K completed the programme successfully, the programme lead liaised with careers coach and leaving care adviser regarding her next steps and K is now being supported into another programme or apprenticeship. K is also keen to start working with LAS mentors to improve her health and reduce anxiety and substance misuse habits.

Elevate was able to arrange with our DWP colleagues to get K a new youth employment coach who will be able to support her further to apply for Kickstart opportunities, when she is ready.

- 4.5 In May 2021 a monthly jobs and opportunities board was developed and is readily available on the BFFC website. Elevate regularly sends the new programmes and vacancies to BFFC Participation Officer, an administrator of the care leavers Facebook page. Elevate has a live vacancy service on IYSS database with suitable opportunities for young people. Elevate will match children looked after and care leavers with the opportunities. Our biggest concern is lack of suitable apprenticeships in construction, hospitality and customer service which are in high demand for this group of young people. In addition, post Covd-19 economy is already seeing job losses in these sectors.
- 4.6 Our collective aim is to create and promote other vocational pathways to this group. Elevate is engaging with employers locally and in the Thames Valley area. We have established links with a few employers including the Oracle shopping centre, Compass Group and Visa. Visa is working on developing a programme specifically aimed at offering care experienced young people taster days in their various departments to raise aspirations and encourage participants into trainee level jobs and apprenticeships.
- 4.7 Elevate participates in the Skills4Life programme aimed at Children Looked After and Care Leavers. We have delivered two face to face and one online session themed My Future, which is designed to prepare young people to aspire to become independent or confident in their career planning.
- 4.8 Elevate contribute in multi-agency transition meetings such as the SEND Strand 4 Supporting young people to prepare for the future, Preparing for Adulthood Panel, Youth Diversion Hub, Extra Familial Risk Panel and children missing education (CME) group. Being actively involved in these core group meetings allows for early identification of any children looked after or care leavers in need of additional support on their future career and employment planning.
- 4.9 Elevate arrange regular local NEET networking events for young people to attend and network with local providers. The last event took place in September 2020, we are currently planning and promoting another networking event for August 19th 2021. We are promoting the event to all NEET care leavers ready to engage into EET, directly contacting them and via other channels such as social media, social workers and support workers.
- 4.10 In 2019-2021 Elevate Service was awarded NEET funding through various grant schemes (SIB, SEND NEET Grant, City Deals), enabling commissioning of EET/ NEET programmes initiatives as outline in table 4.

Table 4 - Elevate EET and NEET Programme Initiatives

Who	When	Offer		
LAS Fitness	July-September 2021	motivational, health and mentoring programme with the aim to re-engage young people who lack motivation and have fallen into unhealthy habits that prevent them from accessing and sustaining EET.		
Starting Point	January 2021 – January 2022	Aspire Mentoring Programme		
Starting Point 2020 -March 2021		Part funded with RBC Cultural Commissioning team an Action Media programme		
Ways into Work	November 2019 – November 2021	To support people with a disability or disadvantage to gain and maintain paid employment.		

New Directions College	Due to start in September 2021	4 x Vocational Pathway Programmes with a combination of work tasters and accreditations.

5.0 Virtual School Service Support

- 5.1 The Virtual School offers comprehensive support and guidance to the Post 16 cohort. Supporting children looked after and care leavers from the age of 16 until 25, both inside and outside of the Reading Borough area. This area of work is led by the Virtual School Assistant Headteacher for Secondary and Post 16, who coordinates the delivery of timely high-quality Post 16 Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and Re-Engagement PEPs which provide a framework to enable young people to access EET opportunities and intervene to prevent children and young people who are at risk of becoming NEET.
- 5.2 In the Ofsted monitoring letter August 2018 and the Ofsted ILACS Report September 2019, it was noted that:

"Progress has been achieved in engaging more young people leaving care in meaningful education, employment and training opportunities. The virtual school is active and influential in its work with post-16-year-old young people through the development of targeted personal education plans (PEPs) and "re-engagement" PEPs." August 23_{rd}, 2018 Ofsted monitoring letter.

"Work by the Virtual School and Care Leaving Service to increase the proportion of care leavers who are in education, employment and training is starting to have a positive impact but remains an area of ongoing work". Ofsted 2019 ILACS Report

- 5.3 The Virtual School ensures that Post 16 students have a termly and quality assured PEP which tracks and monitors attendance, attainment and progress. It also encompasses key transition points with SMART robust targets linked to key interventions. The PEP also informs and supports the educational element of the Pathway Plan.
- 5.4 Of the Post 16-18 cohort, 88% were in EET of which 75% attended college or sixth form and 6.5% were in employment or accessed apprenticeship or training opportunities, and 6.5% were in a secure unit (see table 5 below). The Virtual School works closely with children looked after social workers, and leaving care advisors to support Post 16 transitions, and ensure that all children looked-after and care leavers have a secure 'intended destination'. For those young people who do not have an intended destination, the Virtual School offers support to secure an appropriate destination in line with the September Guarantee. This is the guarantee of an offer made by the end of September of an appropriate place in Post-16 education or training for every young person completing compulsory education.

Table 5 September 2021 CLA Y12 and Y13 Cohort

NCY Cohort	FE College / Sixth	Employment /	Secure Unit	EET	NEET
	Form	Apprenticeships			
Y12 – (30)	84% (25)	6.5% (2)	3% (1)	93.5%(28)	6.5% (2)
Y13 - (28)	65% (18)	7% (2)	10% (3)	82% (23)	18% (5)
Total 58	75% (43)	6.5% (4)	6.5% (4)	88%(51)	12% (7)

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 - 5.5 The Virtual School liaises with Post 16 providers to support young people to secure a place on their chosen courses at college or sixth form. Currently we have 43 (16-18) CLA students in 23 different FE and sixth form settings, of which Reading College is the main provider, with over 50% of the 16-18 cohort attending there.
 - 5.6 The Virtual School continues to support two mentoring programmes which enable young people to develop their confidence and help them to remain in education, employment or training.

These include:

- Spring Forward- This is a DfE funded Higher Education one to one mentoring support programme, which supports existing Year 12 and Year 13 students who are at sixth form or college and are considering university as a future destination. Five Year 12 and Year 13 children looked after, and care leavers have successfully accessed and completed this programme.
- Starting Point- Supporting the roll-out of the one to one programme targeted at Post 16 young people who are NEET or currently disengaged from EET. Referrals have been coordinated jointly with the Elevate Team.
- 5.7 The Emotional Health and Wellbeing Triage Support Group was formed by the Virtual School and Education Psychology Service to ensure the early identification of potential mental health and emotional wellbeing concerns of children looked after. The group provides access to advice and support for children looked after and care leavers who present with a high Strength, Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) score. A total of 5 Post 16 referrals have been made during the last twelve months, these range from young people whose placements have broken down or who need support and guidance in relation to their mental health and emotional well-being. The group is chaired by the Virtual School link EP, Headteacher of the Virtual School and Service Manager for Children Looked After. The group has excellent attendance from partners in CAHMS, Primary Mental Health, Health and Social Care and focuses on the early identification of the emotional health and well-being needs of children looked after. It offers Social Workers direct access to specialist advice and support to enable local services to be accessed timely and equitably.
- 5.8 For all Post 16 children looked after and care leavers who are not in education, employment or training, a Post 16 re- engagement PEP is implemented with key professionals. The re-engagement PEP focuses on setting clear targets and interventions to support re-integration into education, employment or training. This PEP forms the framework for purposeful meetings between young people and key professionals and ensures that appropriate support mechanisms and action plans are in place to re-engage young people back into education, employment and training. The re-engagement PEP also supports young people who have had unexpected placement changes and helps them to re-connect with EET opportunities.

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Re-engagement PEP - Student and Carers Feedback

"feeling really happy and proud of myself for achieving my GCSE Maths and English. Thank you to all staff at Virtual School, and my placement for all the constant support and encouragement to help reconnect back with College and my learning. I feel confident to continue with my future studies and working towards building a better future career."

Y12 Student being Re-integrated back into FE College

"Thank you to the whole team at Virtual School for all their ongoing advice and support with helping all of our young people with their educational needs. Consistency in contact and communication is always prompt and thorough and all of this combined, enables our service to attain the positive results that we thrive on achieving with our young persons. ".

Post 16 Placement Provider Feedback

- 5.9 There were some creditable individual A level and BTEC Level 3 results in Year 13 in which four students completed their level three courses. Three students are progressing onto University to study Games Design at the University of Northampton, Sociology at The University of Exeter and Psychology at Aston University. This is in addition to the existing fifteen care leavers that were already at University during 2020-21. The Virtual School along with the Leaving Care and Elevate teams are working hard to continue to grow the numbers of care leavers applying and being accepted onto university courses.
- 5.10 The Virtual School is linked up with sixteen other Local Authorities in the South East as part of the Post 16 Virtual Schools Network. The network provides a forum to share best practice and to consider ways of collaborating and sharing information across local areas. The contact and support offered through the network is a key driver in ensuring cohesive partnership working across Virtual Schools in the South East and Berkshire areas. This is vital in ensuring that knowledge is shared about access and resources for our young people who live out of borough. In addition, the Berkshire Virtual School Head's University Sub-Group will be providing future 'Open Day' visits at the University of Reading in late October to continue raising awareness of Higher Education opportunities for both secondary and Post 16 young people.
- 5.11 During 2020-2021 two care leavers have successfully been recruited to the Civil Service Care Leaver Internship scheme. The Internships provide exciting opportunities which enable care leavers to experience working in central Government. The aim of the Internships is to help them to develop skills and competencies which we hope will strengthen their career prospects for the longer term. In addition, there is also an increased level of interest of Post 16 children looked after and care leavers opting for apprenticeship programmes. There are currently 8 young people on apprenticeship programmes ranging from childcare to plumbing.



Civil Service Care Leaver Internships Participant Feedback

"I'm super excited to have this opportunity. The prospect of gaining qualifications whilst on a proper salary on the Internship Programme enables me to plan for a better future for myself and my daughter. Thank-you for all the help and support to enable me to access this opportunity".

Post 18 Single Parent Care Leaver

- 5.12 A joint expression of interest pilot bid was submitted by the Virtual School to the Department of Education in July 2021. The bid is to secure additional Post 16 Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) funding to support Year 12 and Year 13 students who are at FE College. Successful bids will be announced in mid- September for pilots to be delivered between the 4th October 2021 until 31st March 2022.
- 5.13 The Virtual School organises monthly EET /NEET tracking meetings in conjunction with the Leaving Care and Elevate teams, to monitor young people who are at risk of becoming NEET and provide access to appropriate resources to enable young people to take up EET opportunities. These meetings also help to disseminate new provider information and provide operational support targeting children looked after and care leavers who are NEET.
- 5.14 Support for unaccompanied asylum -seeking children (UASC) has yielded 100% pass rate for all fifteen UASC students on the Entry Level ESOL programme. Also, GCSE results have shown that two UASC students achieved grade 4 passes in Maths. The Virtual School has established a strong partnership arrangement with Reading and Bracknell College, to establish a fast-track rolling programme for all our UASC students. This enables newly arrived unaccompanied asylum-seeking children to access suitable ESOL provision at college straight away and avoid being NEET.

UASC Student and Carers Feedback

"Being supported by the Virtual School has enabled me to improve my spoken and written English at a speed I couldn't believe it was possible. It also assists me by giving me a structure to work independently and help me improve my overall understanding".

Post 16 UASC receiving 1to1 ESOL support

"Working with the Virtual School has meant that we can progress the young person's education much quicker by ensuring they are on the right path and supporting them with relevant ESOL resources which has led into young people gaining into positive outcomes".

Post 16 – UASC Placement Provider

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

- 6.1 The report shows that that monthly NEET figures has been consistently decreasing and that on-going work and collaboration with the Elevate, Leaving Care and the Virtual School teams is having an impact on reducing the NEET number. Work also needs to continue with other EET provider partners to enable care leavers and children looked after to reach their full potential. Also, for the work of the EET/NEET Tracking group to investigate NEET prevention work with the focus on supporting those care leavers or children looked after to sustain their college or training placements.
- 6.2 A large proportion of NEET young people have no formal qualifications or fewer than 5 GCSEs at grade 4 pass level. Care leavers do not always want to continue with education and are entering low level jobs that offer no training, are temporary and in the sectors that have been badly hit by the Covid pandemic in hospitality and retail. A direct consequence of being in low paid work is job insecurity and when young people are in and out of jobs their chances of career progression is reduced. The aim is to offer a range of training opportunities that combine qualifications with work experience, for example a construction course delivered by the charity New Meaning (Tool Shed). We are aiming to communicate to our young people that they can still achieve qualifications outside the college or school environment as they have options and choices.
- 6.3 To recommend that more advanced EET planning is put in place to support those young people moving placements and still needing transition support to their new EET placement thus ensuring greater coordination of placement planning in line with EET opportunities. This will allow for young people to successfully progress and sustain their education, employment and training opportunities.
- 6.4 To continue to build on maintaining regular communication and promoting local opportunities to encourage and enable social workers, leaving care advisers, placement providers and foster carers, support staff to actively promote local provision to young people. Learning and Training providers need to be accountable on ensuring that good quality provision is delivered to young people, ensuring that young people successfully achieve sustained positive outcomes.
- 6.5 We have a growing number of unaccompanied asylum -seeking children who need support with their career planning and further help to fast-track them onto ESOL programmes. We recommend that further education and other employability programmes are targeted to support their future career aspirations and progression.
- 6.6 There has been a continued take-up of care leavers going to study at University. The future focus is to both grow these numbers and support university retention. To help grow future demand, supporting programmes such as 'Study Higher', a partnership of higher education institutions (universities) and further education colleges will be offered alongside increasing university mentoring programmes such as Spring Forward and targeting secondary age students by raising awareness and actively promoting university open days and alternative viable Post 16 options.
- 6.7 Decrease the dropout rates from further education. Many young people who are now NEET have been enrolled on a full time FE course which they were not able to sustain for longer than 3 months. We will re -start the Post 16 networking group, bringing together a network of partners training /learning providers, further education, support agencies/networks and employers, to work together to offer opportunities to young people in Reading. With each provider bringing something unique to

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- the network, enabling us to build a strong offer of a range of opportunities and support for young people. The aim of the network is to have a pan Reading approach to reduce our NEET numbers, prevent young people early on from falling into NEET and to promote alternative and vocational pathways to employment or training.
- 6.8 History of illness, ill mental health, complex SEND needs are sometimes evident in young people's inability to communicate and wish to avoid professionals. Substance misuse and unstable/ unsupportive living circumstances also play a role in young people's readiness to engage in EET activities. We promote re-engagement opportunities to young people that are not ready to access work or formal training. For example, we have commissioned LAS Mindset, a local company that offers mentoring and one-to-one personal training in the gym. Starting Point also matches mentors who focus on building young people's confidence, self-esteem, offering them social and skills building sessions. Social Workers can make referrals to the Virtual School Emotional Health and Wellbeing Triage Support Group.
- 6.9 Having a criminal record is a significant barrier and limits access to EET opportunities including access to FE and training providers due to risk of reoffending or legally young people are not permitted to work in certain geographical areas or industries. Elevate has a careers coach based at YOS who works with YOS officers to engage young people, including children looked after and care leavers into EET.
- 6.10 Pregnancy/ Parental responsibility for most young people means that they are not available for work by their own choice or their circumstances are not enabling them to be flexible when looking for work/training opportunities. Leaving care advisers refer young parents who are career planning or ready to work into the Elevate service who provide support.
- 6.11 Children looked after and care leavers who are residents out of Reading do not have consistent careers support as many other local authorities have very limited NEET services which often excludes care leavers. Elevate researches the local provision for young people who need more "hands on support" e.g. filling in application forms, accompanying young people to visit employers and training providers. We aim to continue to offer a virtual information and guidance session to each young person and have started working with Resume Foundation, whose job coaches can virtually support young people into EET. This virtual career offer will help to support care leavers and children looked after, who are based outside of the Reading area, and enable them to take-up EET opportunities.